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ABSTRACT

As we enter the 21st century, most of the countries in the world are facing three critical challenges: competing in a global economy, reversing the expansion of a permanent and disenfranchised underclass, and developing a workforce with information-age skills. Many educational reform strategies have been adopted to meet the challenges. In Taiwan, community colleges are proposed as an effective measure to cope with such challenges. The traditional functions of community colleges include transfer education, vocational-technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and community service. It is imperative to establish community colleges to carry out these functions while still maintaining the traditional characteristics of community colleges: low tuition, cost-benefit justifiable programs, and community-based learning. A draft of the Community College Act was enacted by the Ministry of Education (1998) to accelerate the establishment of community colleges. However, the theory and practice in designing such colleges must be scrutinized to smooth the inception of such colleges in Taiwan. This paper addresses the background of such inception, the current status of postsecondary technical education, and the planning strategies for the establishment of community colleges. Contains 16 references. (Author/VWC)

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Moving Toward Community Colleges: A New Alternative in Postsecondary Technical Education in Taiwan, Republic of China

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Abstract

As we enter the 21st century, most of the countries in the world are facing three critical challenges: competing in a global economy, reversing the expansion of a permanent and disenfranchised underclass, and developing a workforce with information age skills (McCabe, 1999). Many educational reform strategies have been adopted to meet the challenges. Among those strategies, community colleges are proposed as an effective measure to cope with such challenges in Taiwan.

The traditional functions of community colleges include transfer education, vocational-technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and community service. It is imperative to establish community colleges to carry out these functions at the same time and still maintain the traditional characteristics of community colleges: low tuition, cost-benefit justifiable programs, and community-based learning. In addition, a draft of the Community College Act was enacted by the Ministry of Education (1998) to accelerate the establishment of community colleges. However, we need to carefully scrutinize the theory and practice in designing such colleges to smooth the inception of such colleges in Taiwan. This paper addresses the background of such inception, the current status of postsecondary technical education, and the planning strategies for the establishment of community colleges.

Key Words: community colleges, postsecondary technical education

As we enter the 21st century, America is facing three critical challenges: competing in a global economy, reversing the expansion of a permanent and disenfranchised underclass, and developing a workforce with information age skills (McCabe, 1999). In fact, these three factors affect most of the countries in the global community. In order to meet the challenges, educational reforms are customarily adopted as appropriate and effective measures. Community colleges were proposed as a higher education reform direction in Taiwan by both *The Educational Reform Recommendation Report* (Educational Reform Commission, 1996), and the White Paper *Towards a Learning Society* (Ministry of Education, 1998).

The Background

In recent years, with the prevailing influence of democracy in Taiwan society, people are starting to examine educational liberalization and equality as a part of their civil rights. As Taiwan society is becoming maturing democracy, it should provide opportunities for citizens to perpetuate social mobility and educational equality. The calls for community colleges rose in Taiwan in almost the same way as their inception in Britain, Germany, and The United States (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Therefore, the system of community colleges is one of the fruits of democracy.

Second, lifelong education is becoming a new direction of the educational development in many developed countries. For instance, the European Commission (1995) promoted the concept of *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, in which it emphasized the impacts of information society, international economy, and technical knowledge. Furthermore, it suggested the change of learning, teaching, and training methods, the reinforcement of lifelong learning basis in the process of basic education and training, flexible learning ways in education, training, and work, and the needs for organizational learning (Wu, 1997). In *The Educational Reform Recommendation Report*, it commented that the increase of life expectancy, the rapid dissemination of information, the formation of democratic society, individual learning rights, and the need for personal development education paved the way for continuing education (The Educational Reform Commission, 1996).

In fact, the learners who have abundant and flexible learning opportunities including both continuing education and recurrent education actually form a lifelong learning society. Therefore, the objectives, program curricula, teaching methodology, and learning environments, evaluation methods, and accreditation system should be flexibly designed. The Educational Reform Commission (1996) and the Ministry of Education (1998) thereby both recommended the establishment of community

colleges.

Third, considering the attendance rates of the next educational stages, in 1997, 92.02% of junior high graduates entered senior high schools while 61.95% of the senior high graduates entered universities and colleges, and 23.32% of the senior vocational high school graduates entered colleges (Won, 1999). Because of the drop of the fertility rate in Taiwan each year, and many high school graduates retaking college entrance examinations, the essence of the problem has shifted from more higher education slots for high school graduates to appropriate career awareness and choices.

Finally, total community development becomes increasingly crucial to local communities. If a community college offers low tuition programs which can provide the community with both needed professionals and continuing education opportunities, the establishment of such higher education institutions can be both cost-effective and flexible in offerings and learning schedules.

The Current Status of Postsecondary Technical Education in Taiwan

Higher education in Taiwan has grown steadily each year (see Table 1). In 1990, college student enrollment was 612,376, and in 1998, it reached 915,921. The growth was due to the influences of Taiwan political, economic, and social changes. Yang (1998) pointed out four visible changing directions: (1). Higher education is moving from elite education to people's education; (2). The higher education system has become an open system; (3). The system has become flexible in program offerings and other services; and (4). The system has undergone gradual decentralization.

Table 1

Student Number in Higher Education in Taiwan

Year	University and Four-Year College	Two-Year and Five-Year Junior College	Total
1980	159,394	183,134	342,528
1990	261,454	315,169	576,623
1995	356,596	394,751	751,347
1998	463,575	452,346	915,921

Source: Ministry of Education (1999). Educational statistics. Taipei: Author.

In the system, there are three types of institutions with different educational objectives: the university and four-year college, the university of technology and institute of technology, and the junior college. In 1950, Taiwan had only one university, three independent colleges, and three junior colleges, with a student body of only 6,665. In 1998, there were 137 universities and colleges including 84 universities and colleges, and 53 junior colleges, with an enrollment of 915,921. At the junior college level, 254,427 students study at two-year junior technical colleges while 197,855 students are enrolled in five-year junior technical colleges and 64 students in three-year junior technical colleges (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Basically the junior colleges are technically oriented with an aim to foster semi-professionals for industry. The offerings in these junior colleges can be classified into the following categories based on specialization: technology, commerce, agriculture, maritime affairs, home economics, pharmacy, medical technology, physical education, arts, humanities, and drama. In terms of the required length of education and admission qualifications, the junior colleges can also be classified into the following three categories (see Figure 1): five-year junior colleges, three-year junior colleges, and two-year junior colleges (Ministry of Education, 1999).

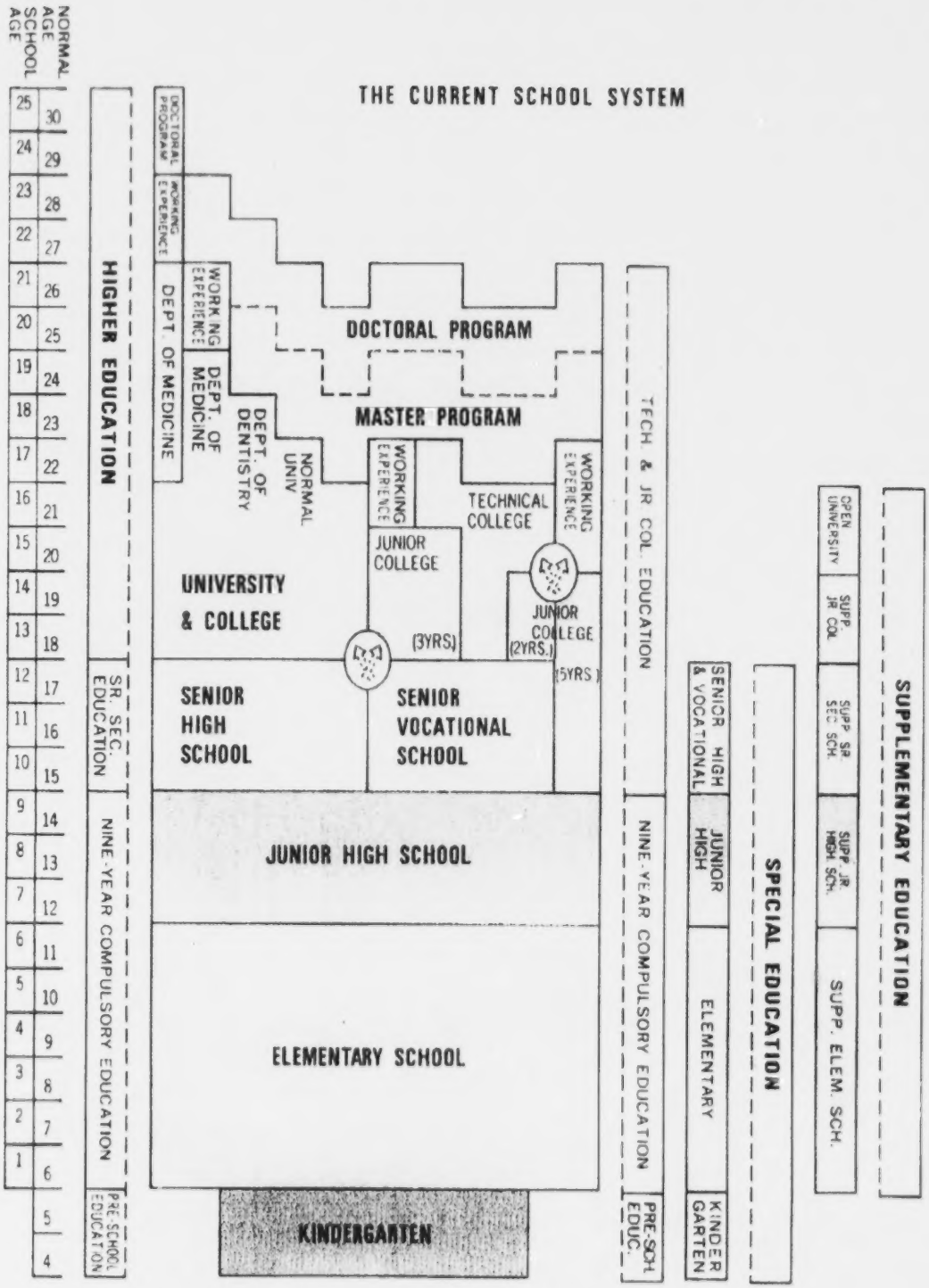

Figure 1
The Educational System of Taiwan

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Although the educational system in Taiwan is a centralized one, higher education institutions are enjoying more and more autonomy to develop their own features regarding program offerings, entrance qualifications, and service areas to meet the challenges of excellence, opportunity, and relevance in higher education. As the concepts of people's college, community-based learning, and lifelong learning enter the arena of higher education, it is the perfect time to reconsider expanding junior colleges' functions to incorporate transfer education, vocational-technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and community service to make the postsecondary education schools into community-based learning centers for all.

The Planning Strategies for Community Colleges

Hollinshead (1936) stated that a community college should meet community needs to provide adult education, and educational, recreational, and vocational activities, and place its cultural facilities at the disposal of the community. Former Minister of Education, Ching-Jeng Lin (1998) further examined possible functions of community colleges in Taiwan and found the following necessary functions: transfer, employability, community reconstruction, community service, and remedial education. Since community-based schools in higher education can better play the role of providing continuing education to the community, community colleges are feasible in providing both formal and informal educational programs, and flexible in class scheduling and admissions (Chang, 1999).

According to the above discussions concerning the functions of community colleges, in September 1998, the Ministry of Education (1998) enacted a draft of the Community College Act to describe the planning requirements of such colleges. Yunlin University of Technology (Chang, 1999) recommended the following planning strategies:

(1). Orientation: Community colleges should provide formal and informal educational opportunities to offer associate degrees and short-term programs, using credit system.

(2). Curricular functions: This includes transfer education, vocational-technical education, developmental education, continuing education, and community service.

(3). Serviced populations: Open admissions policy is adopted.

(4). Types: The forming types of community colleges include new schools, university affiliated schools, the transformation of junior technical colleges, the extension of senior high school programs, or the changing of social

education centers into community colleges.

(5). Programs: The community college programs offer two-year associate degrees, and short-term continuing education certificates. Open admissions, low tuition's, flexible curriculum and teaching time, and easy access are the contributing factors to smooth the implementation of these colleges.

(6). Curriculum: Community colleges should design curricula more flexibly and practically. Besides the associate degree programs, the short-term education programs usually are composed of continuing education, developmental education, vocational-technical education, adult basic education, community education, and leisure education adopting open admissions policy.

(7). Faculty: Teaching faculty should be selected depending on individual program requirements to encompass a large spectrum of skills and academic knowledge in community colleges.

In summary, the Community College Act mandates that such colleges accommodate formal and informal educational activities and become composite higher education institutions. Thus, the community college actually is playing the role of an efficient and effective measure to implement the lifelong learning strategies.

Conclusion

In order to adjust ourselves to meet the challenge of social change, UNESCO (1996) published a book entitled" Learning the Treasures Within", in which "learning to know", "learning to do", "learning to live together", and "learning to be" are considered to be the fundamental things to learn. Moreover, lifelong education is the key for people to enter the 21st century and should be the priority of the future society. It is obvious that lifelong education is becoming the trend of the current higher education.

Community college functions should include transfer education, continuing education, developmental education, community service, and a community-based learning center to ensure the right to learn, and the reconstruction of a learning society (Hu & Lin, 1999). It is imperative to establish community colleges to carry out these functions at the same time and still maintain the traditional characteristics of community colleges: low tuition, cost-benefit justifiable programs, and community-based learning.

Hu (1999) suggested a series of steps for establishing community colleges and three establishment models: new schools, transformation of other institutions, and

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university-affiliated schools for experimental purposes. Lee (1998) supported the idea of the transformation of junior technical colleges as a feasible way to add more functions to their original vocational-technical function, although there are some resistant voices. Vocational high schools are also considered by the Ministry of Education as institutions to be transformed into community colleges. The lifelong learning trend and "the right to learning" concept should be on the top of the agenda list to promote such colleges before the implementation stage takes place. From the history of community colleges in other countries, we can carefully scrutinized the theories and possible planning and implementation strategies for such colleges, especially on the role, objectives, curriculum, faculty, organization, funding, student analysis, community service, and facility planning. Such invaluable information will help us avoid reinventing the wheel. The community college seems thus to be an effective way to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

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